WHISTLE BLOWN ON 'PHYS ED'

'New Math' Works
Foil State Teachers

Editors' Note: A study of Louisiana's critical needs in primary and secondary education has found mathematics and physical education in a critical need for in-service training when faced with a self-analysis by state schools that shows 53 per cent unable to offer an adequate college preparatory curriculum.

The report also wants counselors to steer students into higher math courses if they can handle them to overcome a tendency to take the easier way out under pressure "to please parents or win academic honors and scholarships" with higher grades.

The researchers want teachers to improve in physical education, but their report indicates that's the least of it. The hard judgements are made about what is taught.

A good program in this field, the report says, "provides the student with knowledge, skills and attitudes toward physical activities which carry over into adulthood. Louisiana is blessed with a few programs which achieve (this), but plagued with many which do not begin to meet the needs of the students."

'Limited Offerings'
The report cites "severely limited curricular offerings," an apparent reference to concentration on varsity sports which are seldom carried on in adult activity.

"Lifetime activities such as tennis, golf and bowling consumed only 9 per cent of the instructional time among the schools surveyed," researchers found.

The critical need identified here is a reappraisal of objectives and curriculum.

'Reduction Of Size'
Another is reduction of class size which the researchers found "in tolerably large" in many cases.

It is "not uncommon to be confronted with 60 students in a single class which (would be) composed of individuals ranging in classification from grades nine through 12," said the researchers.

"This practice obviously defies the majority of our laws of learning."

"Excessive Game Playing"
The report also recommends cutting down on "excessive game playing" which eats up instruction periods at the expense of the teaching skills.

And finally, the researchers want physical education teachers to use what they know about students.

In half the schools surveyed, responses indicated that skill and fitness were tested, but the information wasn't used to evaluate or classify students.

Next: The people in education, the teachers and the children.

Not Last Word

At the same time, it would seem that the last word on physical education curricula has long been uttered. Not so, says a study which has blown the whistle on "phys ed."

The critical needs of both fields are outlined separately in the findings of a Northwestern State University of Louisiana study group which surveyed primary and secondary public education last year in a federally sponsored program.

"Flint, Steel"

Considered together, solutions to the kinds of problems found in the two fields represent a flint and steel that flash the spark of education — a prepared, qualified teacher presenting relevant needed materials.

The problems of mathematics instruction stem from one of those knowledge explosions that brought changing programs to Louisiana at the beginning of the 1960s, the Northwestern researchers recall.

Shifts Emphasis

"The shift emphasized new instructional emphasis from 'how' to 'why,' introduced new terminology and teaching procedures, and almost overnight antiquated the training and experience of the state's mathematics teaching force," their report reads.

Louisiana hasn't fully recovered. For one thing, teacher salaries in mathematics compete directly with industry, with results harmful to education.

Hasn't Kept Pace

For another, teacher certification hasn't kept pace with changes in curriculum. The result, the report says, is a disparity between teachers who...